

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (currently amended): A steering wheel comprising:

a center portion;

an outer rim encircling the center portion;

an airbag cover positioned on the center portion capable of being depressed from a normal position to a compressed position; and

an intermediate portion positioned between the center portion and the outer rim, the steering wheel being constructed such that there is no gap at the an interface between the airbag cover and the intermediate portion when the airbag cover is in the normal position, wherein when the airbag cover is moved from the normal position to a compressed position a gap is produced at the interface between the airbag cover and the intermediate portion.

Claim 2 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the intermediate portion comprises one or more functional features.

Claim 3 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the intermediate portion comprises one or more decorative features.

Claim 4 (currently amended): A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the steering wheel further comprises an upper housing that is capable of being depressed from a the normal position to a the compressed position.

Claim 5 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 4 wherein the steering wheel is constructed such that there is no gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion when the upper housing is in the normal position.

Claims 6-7 (canceled)

Claim 8 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 4 wherein the upper housing may be depressed from the normal position to the compressed position by applying a force to the cover.

Claim 9 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 8 wherein the steering wheel is constructed such that if the force is removed, the upper housing will move from the compressed position into the normal position.

Claim 10 (currently amended): A steering wheel as in claim 4 further comprising a horn assembly configured such that depressing the airbag upper housing from the normal position to the compressed position actuates the horn assembly.

Claim 11 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 10 wherein the horn assembly includes one or more springs.

Claim 12 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 11 wherein the one or more springs function to move the upper housing from the compressed position to the normal position.

Claim 13 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the intermediate portion includes an overhanging portion.

Claim 14-15 (canceled)

Claim 16 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 further comprising a lower housing.

Claim 17 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 16 wherein the intermediate portion is mounted to the lower housing.

Claim 18 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 further comprising an airbag and an inflator.

Claim 19 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the center portion comprises a casting.

Claim 20 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 wherein the center portion includes a shell.

Claim 21 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 1 further comprising one or more retention hangers that are designed to engage a retaining wire.

Claim 22 (currently amended): A steering wheel comprising:

a center portion;

an outer rim encircling the center portion;

an airbag cover positioned on the center portion; and

an intermediate portion positioned between the center portion and the outer rim, the intermediate portion comprising an overhanging portion constructed to overlap the airbag cover such that there is no gap at the interface between the airbag cover and the intermediate portion when the airbag cover is in a normal position.

Claim 23 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 22 wherein the intermediate portion comprises one or more functional features.

Claim 24 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 22 wherein the intermediate portion comprises one or more decorative features.

Claim 25 (currently amended): A steering wheel as in claim 22 wherein the steering wheel further comprises an upper housing that is capable of being depressed from a the normal position to a compressed position.

Claim 26 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 25 wherein the steering wheel is constructed such that when the upper housing is in the normal position, there is no gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

Claim 27 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 25 wherein depressing the upper housing from the normal position to the compressed position produces a gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

Claim 28 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 25 further comprising a horn assembly configured such that depressing the upper housing from the normal position to the compressed position actuates the horn assembly.

Claim 29 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 25 wherein the upper housing may be depressed from the normal position to the compressed position by applying a force to the cover.

Claim 30 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 29 wherein the steering wheel is constructed such that if the force is removed, the upper housing will move from the compressed position into the normal position.

Claim 31 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 22 further comprising an airbag and an inflator.

Claim 32 (currently amended): A steering wheel as in claim 22 further comprising a lower housing, the intermediate portion being mounted to the lower housing plate.

Claim 33 (currently amended): A steering wheel comprising:

 a center portion;
 an outer rim encircling the center portion;
 an airbag cover positioned on the center portion, the cover comprising a shingle; and
 an intermediate portion positioned between the center portion and the outer rim, the intermediate portion attached to a the shingle such that there is no gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

Claim 34 (currently amended): A steering wheel as in claim 33 wherein the cover comprises a flex point designed to allow the cover to flex when the cover moves between a normal position and a compressed position.

Claim 35 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 33 wherein the intermediate portion comprises one or more functional features.

Claim 36 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 33 wherein the intermediate portion comprises one or more decorative features.

Claim 37 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 33 wherein the steering wheel further comprises an upper housing that is capable of being depressed from a normal position to a compressed position.

Claim 38 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 37 wherein the steering wheel is constructed such that when the upper housing is in the normal position, there is no gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

Claim 39 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 37 wherein depressing the upper housing from the normal position to the compressed position does not produce a gap at the interface between the cover and the intermediate portion.

Claim 40 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 37 further comprising a horn assembly configured such that depressing the upper housing from the normal position to the compressed position actuates the horn assembly.

Claim 41 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 37 wherein the upper housing may be depressed from the normal position to the compressed position by applying a force to the cover.

Claim 42 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 41 wherein the steering wheel is constructed such that if the force is removed, the upper housing will move from the compressed position into the normal position.

Claim 43 (original): A steering wheel as in claim 33 further comprising an airbag and an inflator.

Claim 44 (currently amended): A steering wheel as in claim 33 further comprising a lower housing, the intermediate portion being mounted to the lower housing plate.

Claim 45 (currently amended): An intermediate portion designed to be positioned on a steering wheel between a center portion and an outer rim, the intermediate portion comprising an overhanging portion that is constructed such that the overhang portion overlaps a portion of the airbag cover so that when the airbag cover is in a normal position there is no gap between the intermediate portion and an airbag cover.

Claim 46 (original): An intermediate portion as in claim 45 wherein the intermediate portion is mounted on a lower housing.

Claim 47 (currently amended): An intermediate portion as in claim 45 wherein the overhanging portion is constructed to overlap and fit tightly with the airbag cover in the normal position.

Claim 48 (original): An intermediate portion designed to be positioned on a steering wheel between a center portion and an outer rim, the intermediate portion being attached to a shingle constructed such that there is no gap between the intermediate portion and an airbag cover.

Claim 49 (original): An intermediate portion as in claim 48 wherein the intermediate portion is mounted on a lower housing.

Claim 50 (currently amended): An intermediate portion as in claim 48 wherein the cover comprises a flex point designed to allow the cover to flex when the cover moves between a normal position and a compressed position.

Claim 51 (new): A steering wheel as in claim 13 wherein the overhanging portion is constructed to limit the outward movement of the airbag cover.

Claim 52 (new): A steering wheel as in claim 22 wherein the overhanging portion is constructed to limit the outward movement of the airbag cover.

Claim 53 (new): A steering wheel as in claim 33 wherein shingle overlaps a portion of the intermediate portion.

Claim 54 (new): An intermediate portion as in claim 45 wherein the overhanging portion is constructed to limit the outward movement of the airbag cover.